

## **Mentoring Children of Prisoners: Impacting Lives-Engaging Adults**

### Worksheet #1

#### *Guiding Principles Discussion Questions*

- I. Relationships are the tool of change: longevity of the match is key.
  - a. Discuss the various relationships in your agency that influence match support policy and practice.
  - b. Identify 1-3 forces at work in your agency that promote match longevity
  - c. Identify 1-3 forces that work against match longevity
- II. Children mourn the loss of the incarcerated parent: Mentors must honor the significance of the prisoner to the child.
  - a. What feelings does this principle raise for you individually and collectively as a group or staff?
  - b. Identify 1-3 forces at work in your agency that support the child's relationship with their incarcerated parent.
  - c. Identify 1-3 forces in your agency that work against supporting the child's relationship with their incarcerated parent.

## **Mentoring Children of Prisoners: Impacting Lives-Engaging Adults**

III.Caregivers are the gatekeepers of the mentoring relationships: Programs can strive to minimize loyalty conflicts for the child and alienation for the caregivers through policies and practice.

- a. In what ways are caregivers involved in the mentoring process at your agency?
- b. Identify 1-3 reasons to involve caregivers in the process
- |
  - c. Identify 1-3 reasons not to involve caregivers in the process

IV.Agencies provide the scaffolding that supports the mentor and the match: training and on going supervision is essential.

- a. Name 1-3 policies that are in place to support mentor/mentee matches at your agency.
- b. What are the factors in your agency that support the staff to support the match?
- c. What are the factors in your agency that interfere with staff support of matches?

## **Mentoring Children of Prisoners:** Impacting Lives-Engaging Adults

## Mentoring Children of Prisoners: Issues Concerns and Strategies

### Worksheet # 2 Where Do You Stand?

*When each statement below is read write your initials next to the “stand” you take, marking whether you agree, disagree or are undecided.*

**Statement** – “Prisoners can be bad citizens and still be good parents.” - Liz Gaynes

Agree

Disagree

Undecided

**Statement** - Most parents in prison have a history of drug and alcohol use, abuse and addiction so they were probably not very concerned about their children before they went to prison.

Agree

Disagree

Undecided

**Statement** - Children of prisoners are better off without contact with their parents.

Agree

Disagree

Undecided

**Statement**-In the communities that children of prisoners often come from, the incarceration of a parent is part of life ...a right of passage...and has little stigma or trauma associated with it.

Agree

Disagree

Undecided

## Mentoring Children of Prisoners: Issues Concerns and Strategies

**Statement** - For *some* children of prisoners, the better parent is the one in prison or jail.

Agree

Disagree

Undecided

**Statement** - Prison visits will make children too scared or they will desensitize them to the punitive nature of incarceration.

Agree

Disagree

Undecided

**Statement** - Children of prisoners need a mentor to stand in for their incarcerated parent.

Agree

Disagree

Undecided

**Statement** – The primary responsibility of a mentor is to provide things for a child that his or her family cannot.

Agree

Disagree

Undecided

**Mentoring Children of Prisoners:**  
**Impacting Lives-Engaging Adults**

***Stories from the field-What would you do?***

1. Malik (9 year old, African American) and his mentor are driving to the movies and see a car on the side of the road with a police car behind it. The driver of the car is black. Malik says “damn, another brother pulled over for no good reason...if my Dad hadn’t been profiled he wouldn’t be locked up .All he had was some weed...”
2. Nathan meets with his mentor, John every week. He often talks about how much he misses his father but many of his stories are about how kids didn’t mess with him or make fun of him when his dad was around because his dad would beat them up if they did. Nathan’s dad writes to him regularly and Nate often reads the letters to John and asks John to help him to write back. The letters often contain phrases like “be strong now little man...don’t you cry, I will be out of here soon”(he has at least 5 years left) or “Take care of your sister and keep an eye on your mom” or “ don’t take any crap from anyone and if anyone bothers you, I will kick their butts when I get out.” John says that he told Nate that his father is wrong and that violence is not the answer and that he really does not need to take care of his sister because he is only 10.
3. George is a 10-year-old child. His father is in prison. He lives with his mother and 4 younger sisters. The family has lived in the U.S. since George was 3. They are originally from West Africa. George’s mother signed him up with Big Brothers Big Sisters because she thought that he needed more one- on- one attention than she could give. Also, she thought that a mentor could help socialize George in the ways of American life. George and his family have regular contact with the father and visit him every other week in prison. George’s mother is a respiratory therapist. She has a good job but still has trouble making ends meet.Nick is George’s mentor. Nick is Caucasian. His family emigrated from Russia when he was 2. Nick is 22 and he works as a waiter, but his passion in life is ice-skating. He plays for a community hockey team and takes figure skating lessons. Nick’s father died 5 years ago in an accident and there was a lawsuit that left Nick and his mother a lot of money. Nick signed George up for skating lessons at George’s request. When George’s mother was told, she said no because if she couldn’t afford to give her daughters the ballet and flute lessons they wanted, she couldn’t let George have skating lessons. It wouldn’t be fair to the other children. George’s mother also asked Nick not to buy him clothes every weekend. She said that she can provide those things for her family. Another problem arose when George’s mother’s work schedule changed and she needed to change Nick’s day with George to Sunday. George’s mother also said that every other Sunday they went to visit the prison, so the mentoring meetings would have to be every other Sunday for a while. Nick was upset because he said he had bought tickets for a variety of events for the next few Sundays. George said he didn’t want to go and visit his father anyway and wanted to be with Nick instead.

## **Mentoring Children of Prisoners: Impacting Lives-Engaging Adults**

4. Graziella was referred to the program by the school social worker and identified as a child with an incarcerated mother. The mentoring program is for children at risk, a not just child of incarcerated parents. At the intake home visit, Graziella's guardian, her aunt, told staff that they have told Graziella that her mother is away at school and would like the agency to respect her decision not to tell the truth. After several months as Graziella's mentor, Sarah feels that it is wrong to lie to her and wants staff to let the aunt know that it is not in the child's best interest to keep the truth from her.
  
5. Nancy got a call from Charmaine's grandmother in the middle of the night. She was having severe chest pains and was calling 911. Charmaine told her grandmother that she wanted to go to Nancy's instead of the neighbors. Nancy told Grandma that she really could not take Charmaine and is now feeling really guilty and upset. She called the match support staff the next day to ask if she should have taken Charmaine and to say that she has been worried about the caregiver's health for some time.